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ABSTRACT

An overview is presented of school programs that utilize the resources of the local community as an educational tool. Examples are presented of ways in which successful field trip programs have been organized and administered. Included in this report are citations of articles and documents available from the ERIC information system. (JD)

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Briefly on . . .

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Community Resources

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EXPANDING THE CLASSROOM WITH COMMUNITY RESOURCE SPEAKERS AND FIELD TRIPS

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Despite much adverse publicity about the decline of education in this country, public perception of the quality of schools is not altogether unfavorable.

A recent Gallup survey, Albert Shanker reports, showed that although the college educated citizenry thinks the quality of schools has declined, "parents who have children now attending schools say that today's education is better and by the fairly substantial margin of 53 percent to 39 percent."1 People who are close to the schools evidently have more favorable impressions, and it seems from this data that the possibility exists for improving public attitudes and support of schools by improving the communication process between school and community. Much has been written and many programs have been implemented, but as Schofield points out, "In spite of well-intentioned efforts of American educators, the gap between what transpires within the school and the 'real world' outside school walls still remains the central philosophical and practical problem facing education today."2

One way for teachers and schools to improve communication with the community is through initiatives and programs that enlist the support and involvement of community resources. These efforts can serve two functions: They can tap the immense resources the community has to offer the schools and thus enhance the quality of education while making the curriculum more relevant to the "real world"; and they can increase the school's visibility among citizens, and thereby improve the image of the school, create better understanding, and increase public support.

OVERVIEW AND GUIDELINES

Hickey offers an operational definition of the community education concept at work in the classroom by outlining the following characteristics: (1) The classroom is viewed as a community with common goals and interests; (2) The classroom community uses, on a regular basis, resources from its neighborhood communities; and (3) The classroom community moves to the neighborhood community whenever it can provide a better learning environment than the school.3 Hager summed up some of the benefits that community involvement activities can offer the teacher and classroom, benefits that include:

> gaining greater knowledge of community resources and social agencies; making use of the known resources which offer their services or materials free of

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charge; finding new ideas for presenting subject matter; developing workable projects for classroom presentation; acquiring awareness of job opportunities, technical and vocational, in the community and providing students with this information; giving residents of the area an opportunity to become acquainted with the goals and aims of the schools; and establishing a bibliography of resource materials for use in the classroom.4

The classroom teacher is obviously of central importance in this process, but much can and should be done at administrative levels. For example, school administrators can set up a file of community resources that are available. Hager points out a variety of sources that can be consulted in building such a file, not the least of which are parents. She also includes city and county government, parks and recreation departments, county health organizations, children's services divisions, Red Cross, Civil Air Patrol, National Guard, local churches, American Cancer Society, public welfare agencies, and senior citizens.5 Local businesses and companies are excellent sources as well and will often volunteer their employees as resource speakers or field guides.6

Two basic systems have been used most often for resource files. The first is a spiral bound catalogue arrangement, and is the easiest and most accessible system to set up. Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland, for example, use a standardized form to gather information from area businesses and industries regarding field trips, field activities, day-long observations, staff available for school visits, hiring practices, work experience programs, and reference personnel. These forms are arranged by categories in a spiral bound notebook and distributed to teachers. The teachers themselves are responsible for contacting resource speakers and making appointments.7

A more comprehensive and flexible format, but usually less accessible, is the file card system. Roseville Area School District in Minnesota has developed a program based on this model that includes special measures to insure accessibility. Their file card format is arranged according to the U.S. Office of Education cluster system, and provides space for additional information such as teacher and student evaluations of speaker presentations. These evaluations add a degree of quality control to the program. A resource person is responsible for locating speakers, making arrangements for time and place, sending letters of confirmation, suggesting speaker guidelines, providing evaluation forms, and even meeting the speaker and bringing him or her to the classroom. An active promotional program, including memos and public address announcements, was also established to ensure teacher awareness.8 Other programs include training and orientation for community participants to upgrade the quality of their involvement. In general, more sophisticated and comprehensive programs do require greater school commitment and funds to be successful.

AVOIDING TROUBLE

Careful planning is essential to avoid quagmires when programs overstep certain limits or are

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improperly administered. An example of a program that failed, primarily because of these reasons, was the Leonia, New Jersey, alternative high school program in which large numbers of volunteers offered courses in their fields of expertise for high school graduation credit. Many highly qualified instructors were recruited, including university professors and nationally known actors. However, faculty and administration were uneasy with the program, which had been implemented by the Board of Education. Teachers thought they were being displaced by people who were not certified or qualified to teach. A lawsuit was filed by the Leonia Education Association, and the commissioner of education finally ruled that certified teachers must be in charge of all instruction given for credit. This decision was interpreted by the superintendent as meaning that community resource people were to be used as guest lecturers, and not to provide complete units of study.9

The conflict at Leonia illustrates that a community resource program cannot work without the full support, cooperation, and enthusiasm of those involved, i.e. the administrators, teachers, students, and resource people. The program must be carefully balanced so as not to threaten or overburden any of the groups. Several further points can be made: (1) Too much enthusiasm on the part of teachers can lead to overburdening the volunteers; (2) inadequate support and supervision from teachers will lead to ineffective instruction; (3) failure to keep accurate records or provide access to information may lead to a breakdown in the program; and (4) a proper balance must be struck between provisions for academically and vocationally oriented students.10

One method for establishing a groundwork among teachers and community resource people is through inservice education. Ohio State University has prepared a module for teachers that provides general guidelines on kinds of subject matter experts, when to use them, preparing for the class visit, techniques used during the presentation, and follow-up activities. The module stresses that the overriding reason for using a classroom speaker is to enable students to achieve desired educational outcomes.11

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Oregon has developed a similar guide for resource persons. The booklet is designed to help resource people plan their time with students, evaluate student performance, and deal with problems of poor behavior and attitude. The guide emphasizes that the resource person can serve in a number of different roles including model, supervisor, instructor, counselor, and evaluator.12

SUMMARY COMMENTS

Much of the literature and many of the programs on using community resources focus on career education, but there is no reason to limit a program to this emphasis. Many community members can share numerous, valuable experiences in a variety of areas including travel, arts and crafts and history (e.g., senior citizens' personal accounts can give life to textbook history). The same is true of field trips into the community.

The final responsibility for being aware of and choosing the kinds of experiences and instruction needed in the classroom lies with the teacher.

As Peters points out,

> If today's programs of instruction are to be relevant to both the student's and society's needs as well as being associated with the life of the community, then classroom teachers must have an in-depth knowledge of the character of the community, must perceive the values of the community to the formal education process, and must actively work to incorporate community resource people and places into the kindergarten through grade twelve process.13

NOTES

(Full citations of documents with ED numbers may be located in the monthly ERIC index, Resources in Education.)

1 Albert Shanker, "Poll Shows Support for Education," American Teacher 64, no. 3 (November, 1979), p. 8.

2 Dee Schofield, Community Schools. ACSA School Management Digest, Series 1, Number 15. ERIC/CEM Research Analysis Series, Number 42 (Burlingame, Calif.: Association of California School Administrators, and Eugene, Ore.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1978), p. 1. (ED 162 388)

3 Howard W. Hickey, "Community Education's Implications for Teaching," Journal of Teacher Education 28, no. 4 (July-August 1977), pp. 19-20.

4 Donna L. Hager, "Utilizing Community Resources In and Out of the Classroom," Community Involvement for Classroom Teachers (Charlottesville, Va.: Community Collaborators, 1977), p. 27. (ED 146 124)

5 Ibid., p. 28.

6 P. O. Gonder, Linking Schools and the Community. Education U.S.A. Report (Arlington, Va.: National School Public Relations Association, 1977). (ED 144 202)

7 Career Education and the Business Community: A Joint Effort (Upper Marlboro, Md.: Prince George's County Board of Education and Greenbelt, Md.: Prince George's County Chamber of Commerce, 1975). (ED 118 913)

8 Dorothy Henriksen, ed., A Model for a School-Community Resource Directory (Roseville, Minn.: Roseville Area School District 623, 1978). (ED 153 030)

9 Vicki I. Karant, "Socrates Denied: A Defeat for Community Resource People in the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan 58, no. 8 (April 1977), p. 639-41.

10 Margaret J. Mullen, A Volunteer Program in Vocational Information and Career Guidance for Secondary Schools. A Handbook (Redwood City, Calif.: Sequoia Union High School District, May 1968), p. 12. (ED 024 809)

11 Professional Teacher Education Module Series. Use Subject Matter Experts to Present Information. Module C-20 of Category C--Instructional Execution (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1977). (ED 149 084)

12 Ruth Burt and Marcia Douglas, The Community Resource Person's Guide for Experience-Based Learning (Portland, Ore.: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1977). (ED 153 917)

13 R. O. Peters, The Community Based School and Community Oriented Teachers: For Student Learning in the Real World of the 1970's (Arlington, Va.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 1977), p. 12. (ED 138 572)

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